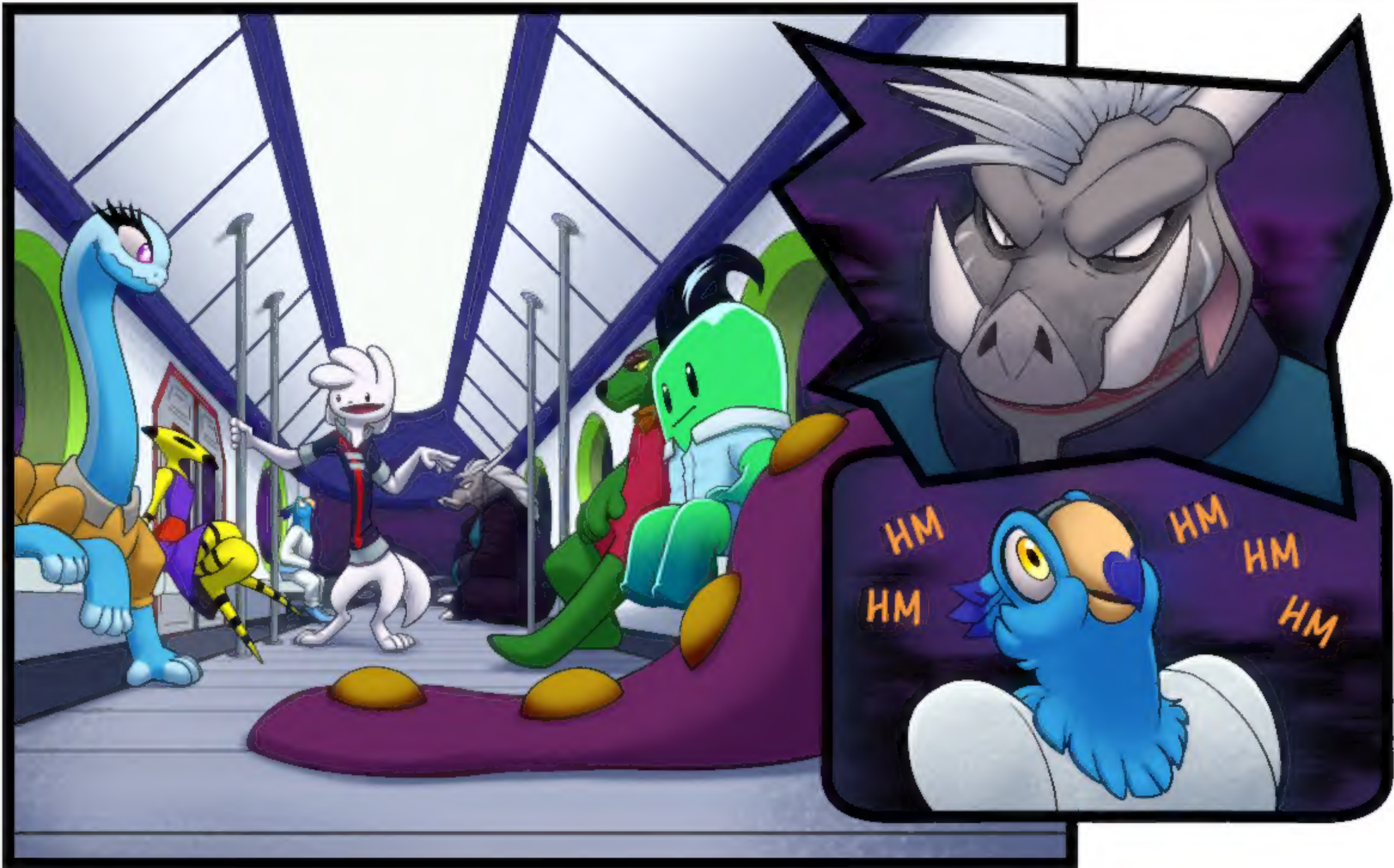
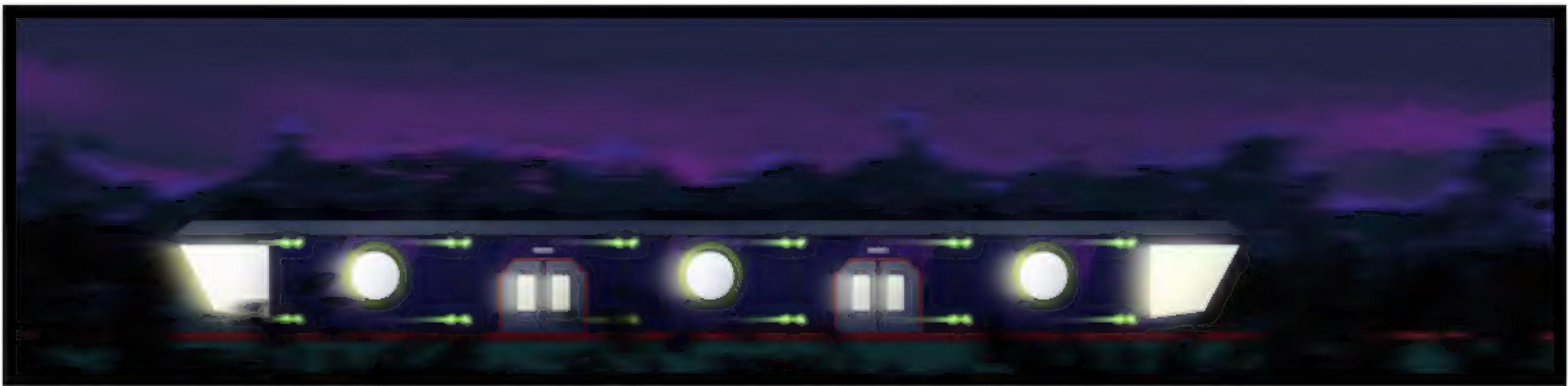
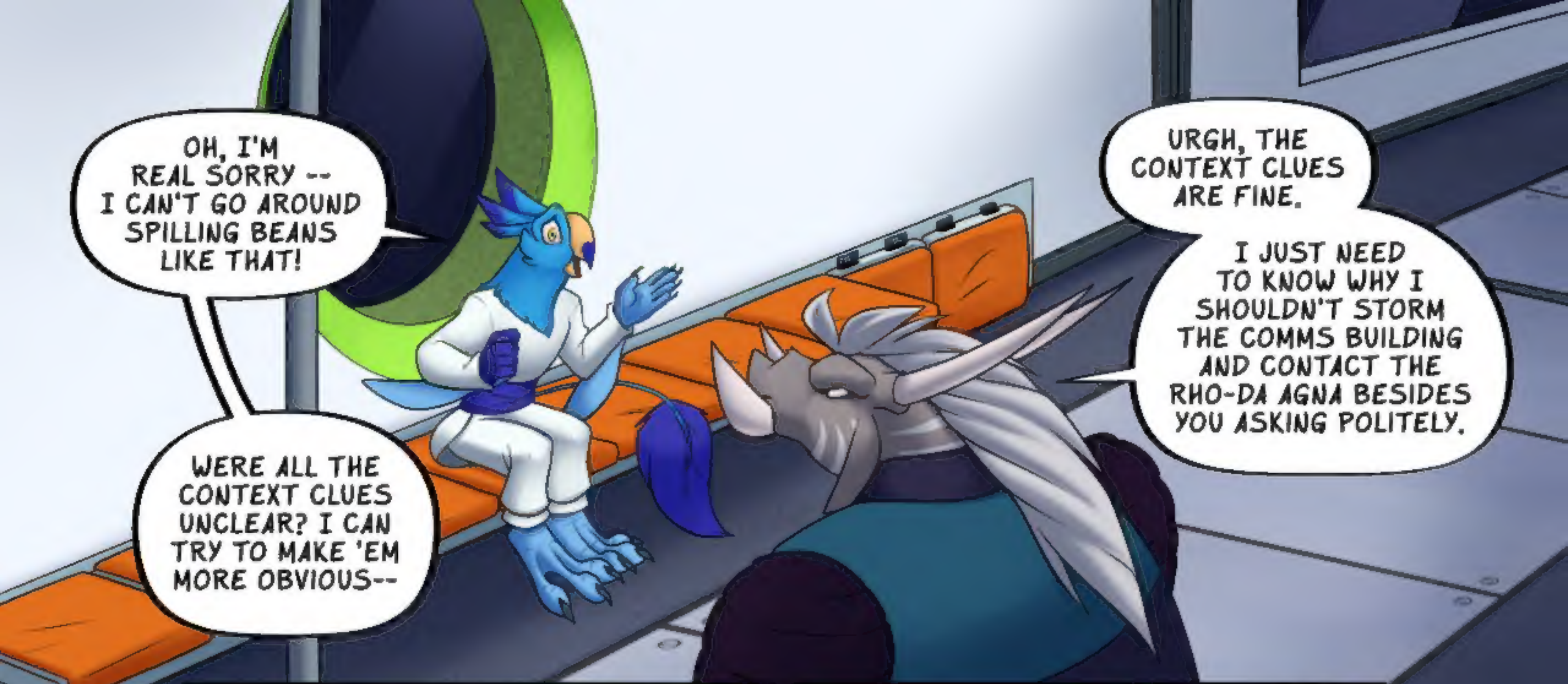






OH, I'M
REAL SORRY --
I CAN'T GO AROUND
SPILLING BEANS
LIKE THAT!

WERE ALL THE
CONTEXT CLUES
UNCLEAR? I CAN
TRY TO MAKE 'EM
MORE OBVIOUS--

URGH, THE
CONTEXT CLUES
ARE FINE.

I JUST NEED
TO KNOW WHY I
SHOULDN'T STORM
THE COMMS BUILDING
AND CONTACT THE
RHO-DA AGNA BESIDES
YOU ASKING POLITELY.



WELL, FOR
ONE THING, THEY
ABSOLUTELY
HATE YOU!

ZHAZE.

I KNOW, I KNOW.
JUST HANG ON
A SECOND.



THIS IS THE
LAST STOP, ISN'T
IT? SHOULDN'T WE--

NOPE! KEEP
HANGING.
OUR DESTINATION'S
JUST AHEAD. NOW,
LET'S SEE -- WHAT
CAN I SHARE...?



OOH OOH!
HOW MUCH DO
YOU KNOW ABOUT
THE RADIX TRINE?

THOSE KASTINIAN
BOAT-CITY THINGS? I
KNOW THERE'S ONE IN
EACH OF THEIR MEGACITIES.
AND THAT THEY'RE KEY
MILITARY TARGETS.

GO ON.

UH... I THINK
THEY'RE HOW KASTINA
WAS FIRST FOUNDED? THEY
WERE MADE TO INDEFINITELY
SUSTAIN THEIR POPULATION
OUT AT SEA--

-- BUT THEY
LANDED HERE ONE
DAY AND SET UP SHOP
SHORTLY AFTER.

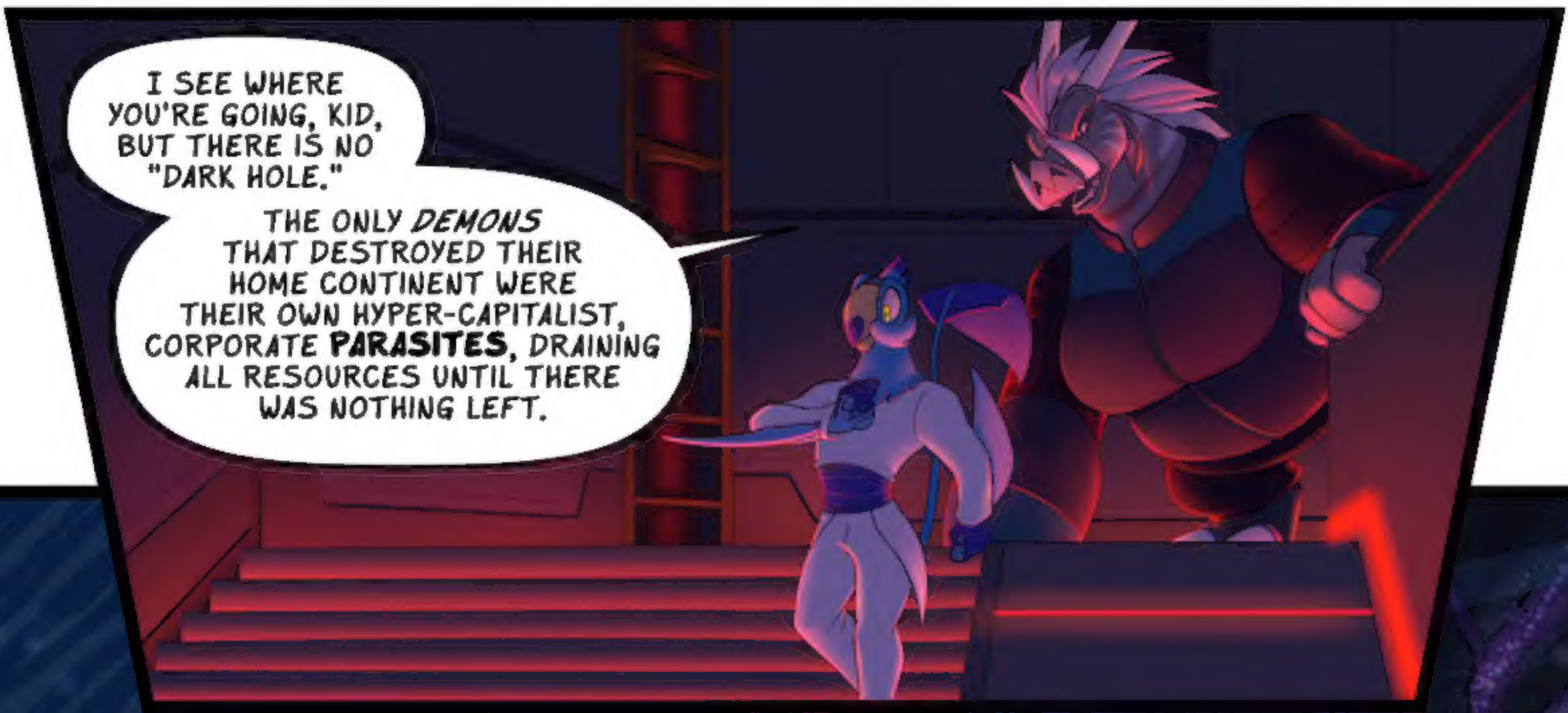
ANYTHING
ELSE?

ANYTHING
ELSE IS
STORYTELLING.

AW, YOU'RE
NO FUN. COME
ON! LET'S JUMP
DOWN THIS DARK
HOLE TOGETHER.

FIGURATIVELY
AND LITERALLY!

UGH.



I SEE WHERE
YOU'RE GOING, KID,
BUT THERE IS NO
"DARK HOLE."

THE ONLY *DEMONS*
THAT DESTROYED THEIR
HOME CONTINENT WERE
THEIR OWN HYPER-CAPITALIST,
CORPORATE **PARASITES**, DRAINING
ALL RESOURCES UNTIL THERE
WAS NOTHING LEFT.



WELL,
THAT'S PARTLY
TRUE, BUT-

HOLD ON,
ARE WE IN AN
UNDERWATER
TUNNEL?

A **SECRET**
UNDERWATER
TUNNEL.

IN A SCHOOL...
FOR CHILDREN.

YEAH, Y'KNOW,
JUST IN CASE!

OH, OF COURSE.
MY MISTAKE. PLEASE
CONTINUE EDUCATING ME
ABOUT DARK HOLES.

OKAY!

UGH...



SO, CORPORATE
DEMONS ASIDE, IN
THE ABSENCE OF REAL
SUPERNATURAL ENTITIES--

I MEAN, CAN
YOU IMAGINE?
HAHA!--

THERE'S JUST
SOME STUFF THAT'S
BETTER SEEN THAN TOLD
ABOUT. WHICH IS WHERE ALL
THIS SECRECY COMES IN.



ZHAZE, I'M
GONNA BE
HONEST

NO NEED.
I KNOW THIS ALL
LOOKS REEEEEALLY
SUSPICIOUS.

AND TO
BE FAIR, IT
DEFINITELY IS!



BUT YOU
WANTED ANSWERS,
RIGHT?

THIS IS HOW
YOU GET'EM.



REMEMBER.
WE'RE BEING
STEALTHY WITH
THIS ONE.

LIVE
SURVEILLANCE
ONLY.

IF YOU SEE
ANYTHING, SHOOT
IT BACK TO ME AND
DO NOT ENGAGE
DIRECTLY.

KEEP YOUR LIGHTS
OFF. WE DON'T WANT
YOU TO BE SPOTTED
LOOKING AROUND
UP AT THE SKY.

AND WHATEVER
YOU DO, DO NOT
LEAVE YOUR DORM
BUILDING. STAY
INSIDE AT
ALL TIMES...

EVERYONE
MADE SURE THE BIG
LOBBY WINDOWS ARE
LOCKED, RIGHT?

YES!

GOOD. LET'S
DO THIS!

GO

-KNOCK-
-KNOCK-

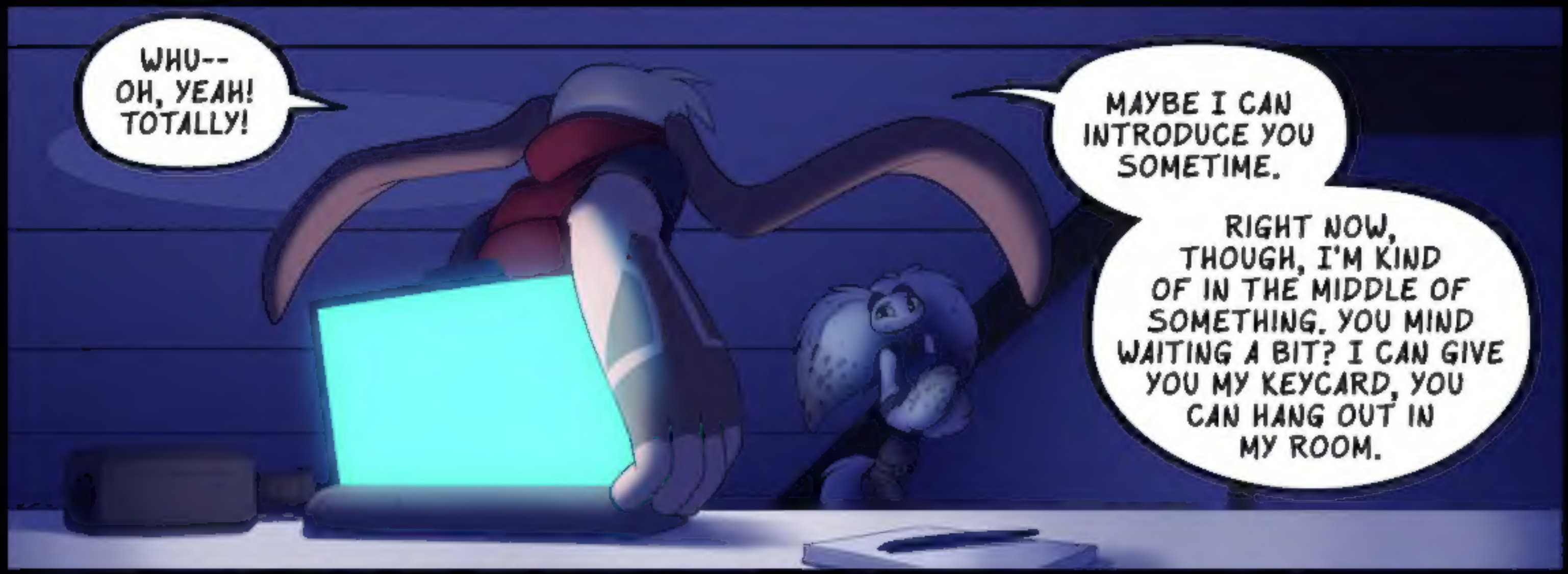
AHEM



FALLAN! HI!
YOU'RE...
HERE!

HOW--- DID
YOU KNOW I
WAS UP HERE?

WELL, I WAS
WAITING AT YOUR
DORM AND THEN SAW
YOU ARRIVE IN THE AREA
WITH... FRIENDS? YOU
HAVE OTHER FRIENDS?



WHU--
OH, YEAH!
TOTALLY!

MAYBE I CAN
INTRODUCE YOU
SOMETIME.

RIGHT NOW,
THOUGH, I'M KIND
OF IN THE MIDDLE OF
SOMETHING. YOU MIND
WAITING A BIT? I CAN GIVE
YOU MY KEYCARD, YOU
CAN HANG OUT IN
MY ROOM.



ACTUALLY, UH...
YOU KNOW, WE DIDN'T
REALLY GET TO TALK MUCH
YESTERDAY, AND THERE'S
SOMETHING WE NEED
TO DISCUSS.

ALONE.



MESSAGE RECEIVED.
CONVERTING TEXT
TO SPEECH.

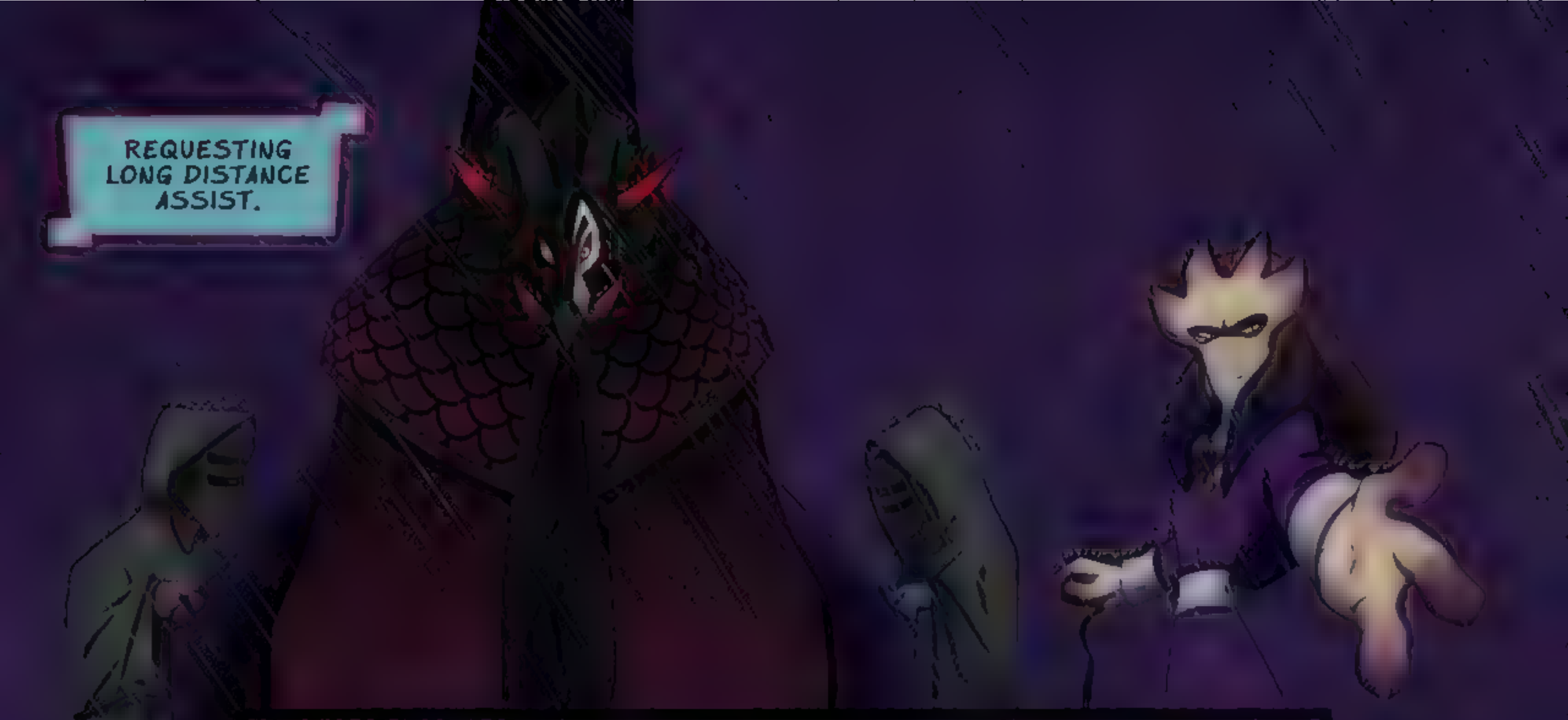
TARGET IS
IN UPPER LEVEL
OF HUB BUILDING.
DIRECT ACCESS
VIA WOODS FACING
TERRACE.

FEW SECURITY
PERSONNEL AT
PERIMETER BUT
NOT WITHIN THE
DORM GROUNDS.

SOME DORM
KIDS MAYBE
DELIBERATELY
WATCHING
THE SKY.

TARGET SUSPECTS
PHONE ACTIVITY.
GOING SILENT.
END OF MESSAGE.

SPIRIT HOOK
TO CONVOY:



REQUESTING
LONG DISTANCE
ASSIST.



THERE'S A
LOT OF ANALOG
SURVEILLANCE. I NEED
THE AREA BLINDED.

PLEASE...

DON'T...

PLEASE...



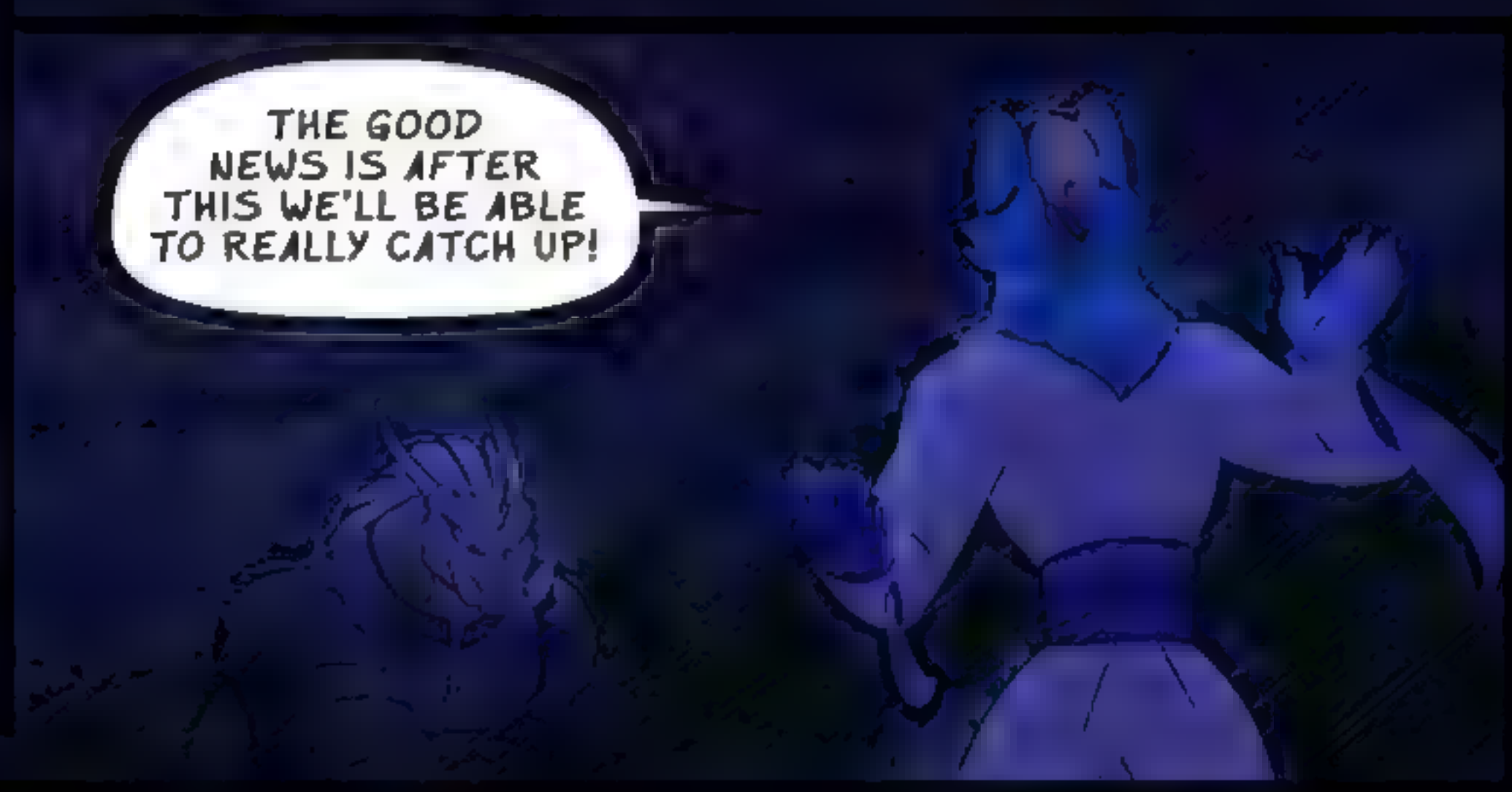
I NEED
MORE DARKNESS,
MORE RAIN--

WINDS STRONG
ENOUGH TO BLOW
STUFF AROUND.

MAKE IT
IMPOSSIBLE FOR
ANYONE TO SEE OR
HEAR ANYTHING DIRECTLY
IN FRONT OF THEM.



THE GOOD NEWS IS AFTER THIS WE'LL BE ABLE TO REALLY CATCH UP!



YOU FEEL THAT?

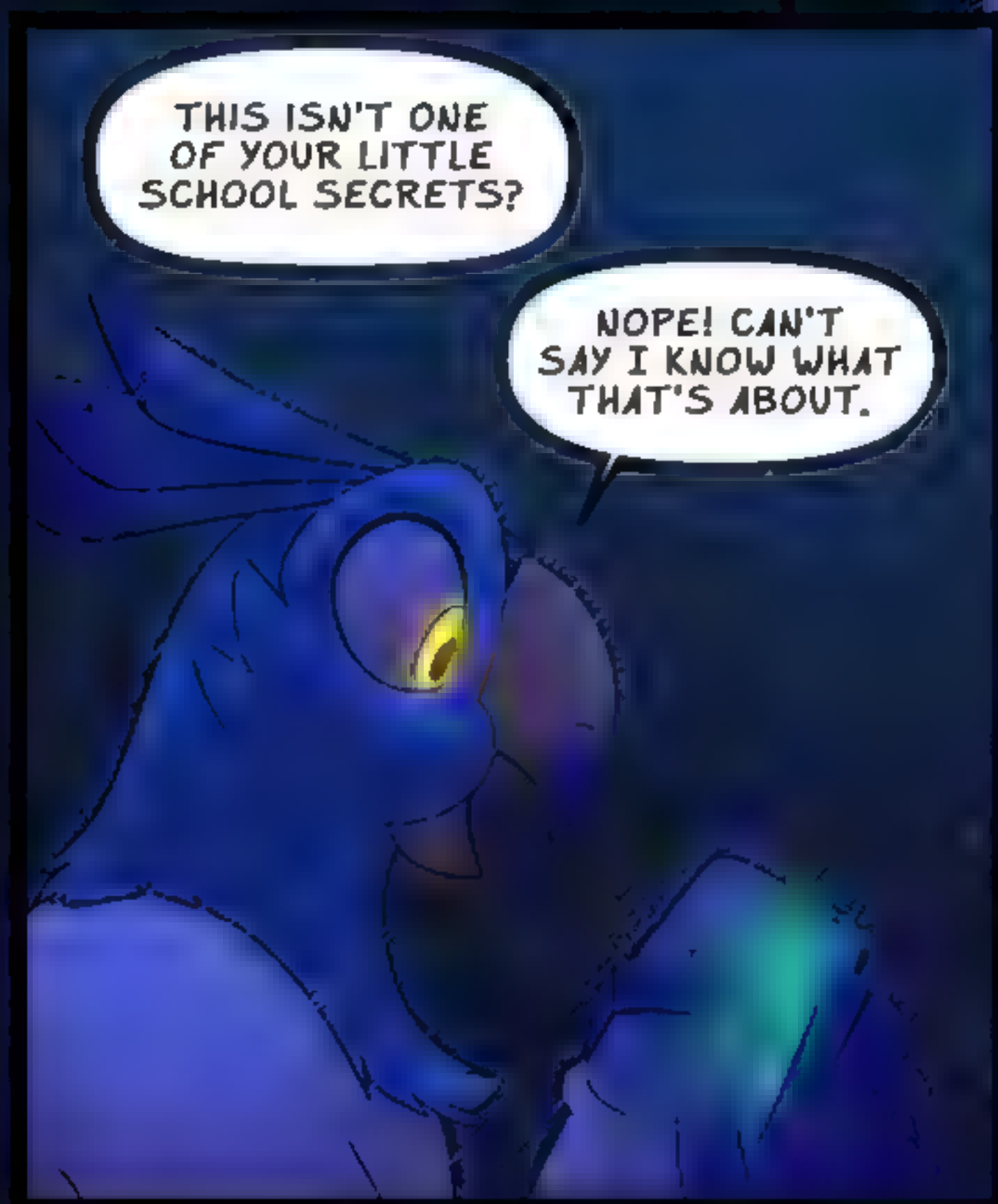
FEEL WHAT?

WIND JUST CHANGED...

THOSE CLOUDS AREN'T MOVING RIGHT. SOMEONE'S MESSING WITH THE WEATHER.



OOOOOH, *NICE* ARCH-CURSOR SENSES! I'LL GO AHEAD AND REPORT THAT.



THIS ISN'T ONE OF YOUR LITTLE SCHOOL SECRETS?

NOPE! CAN'T SAY I KNOW WHAT THAT'S ABOUT.



BUT I DO KNOW WHO CAN DO SOMETHING WITH THAT INFORMATION.

I ALREADY ADMITTED
IT WAS WRONG OF ME TO
PICK ON THOSE KIDS, BUT I
NEVER LAID A HAND ON THEM.
YOU **KNOW** I NEVER WOULD!
THIS IS STUPID!

SORRY, GUYS. STILL
TALKING. GONNA BE
MUTED FOR LONGER
THAN I THOUGHT.

I CAN SEE
WHY YOU THINK
THAT, BUT DO YOU
UNDERSTAND MY
CONCERN?

-CLICK-

NO!

I MEAN--
I DON'T KNOW,
MAYBE!

BUT WE CAN
TALK ABOUT THIS
TOMORROW WHEN I
DON'T HAVE A WHOLE
LOT GOING ON.

HERE'S THE
THING, KHEIL--

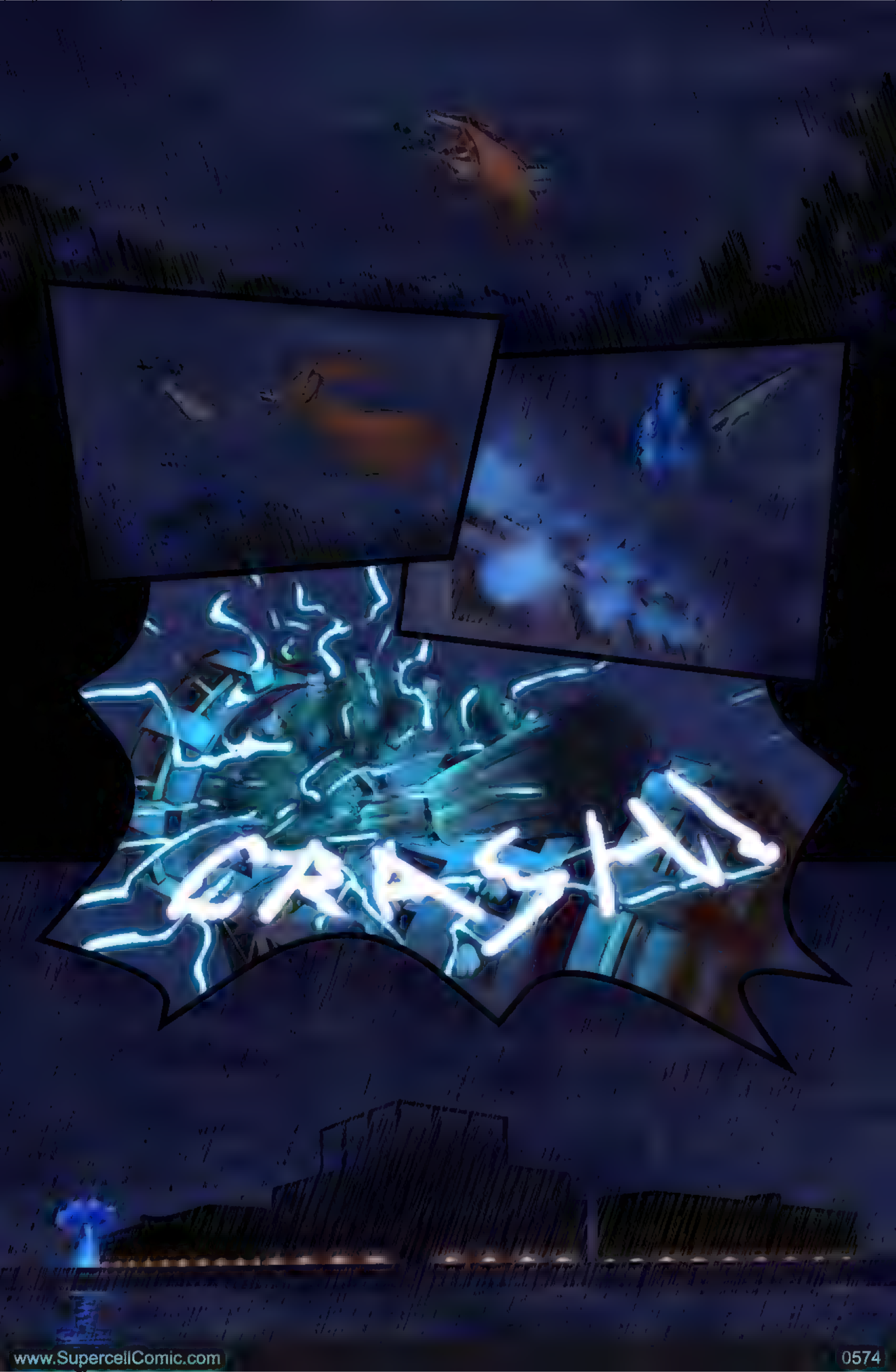
RIGHT NOW I'M
NOT CONVINCED YOU
ACTUALLY HAVE NEW FRIENDS,
OR IF YOU JUST COERCED A
BUNCH OF KIDS TO DO
YOUR BIDDING.

DUDE!



WHOOOOOSH

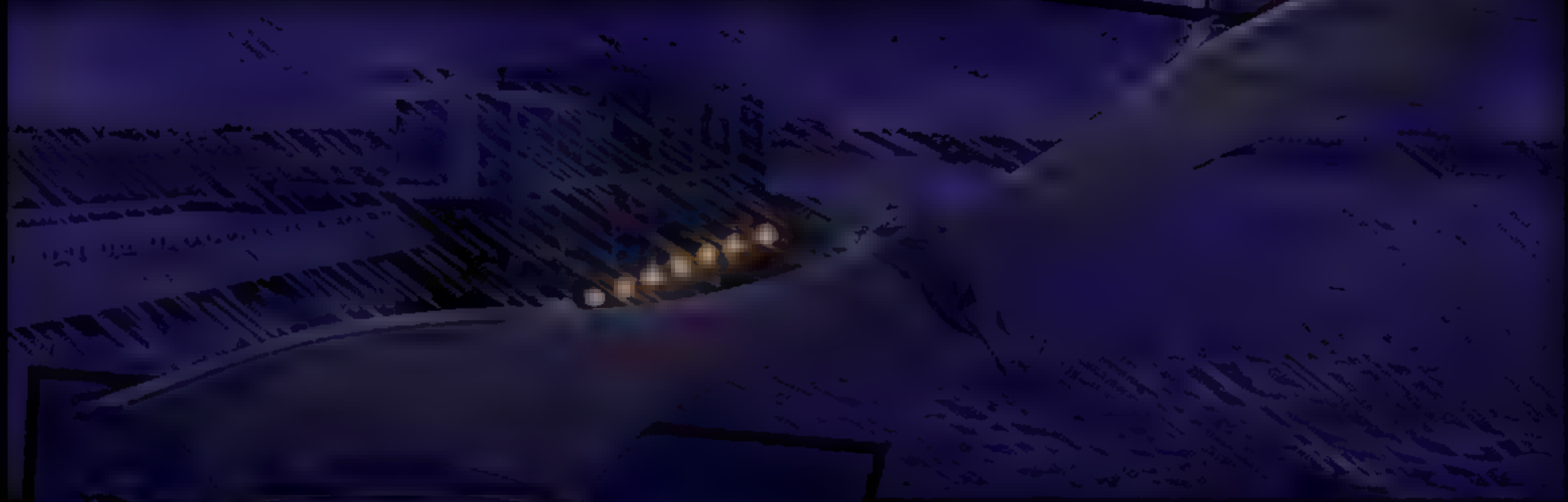
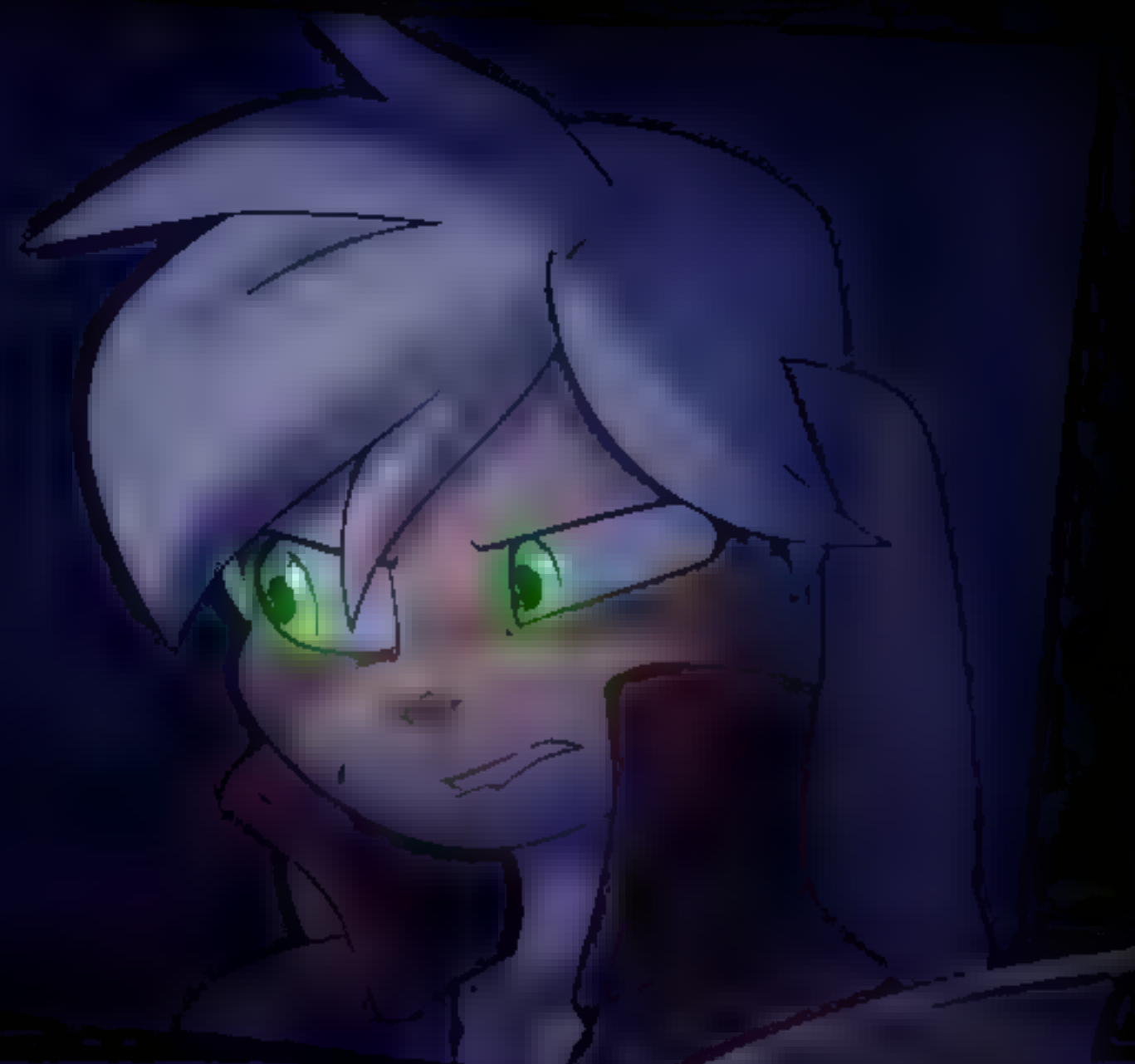
SNAP!





THE HELL?

POWER OUTAGE?



EVERYONE. STAY CONNECTED AND KEEP AN EYE OUT, BUT I'M CALLING OFF THE MAIN GAME.



OH, WELL, HEY, MAYBE NOW WE CAN JUST CHILL AND PROPERLY TALK?



OZ, GET BACK HERE WHILE I PACK UP.

YOU GO IT.

-CLICK-





DUDE,
ENOUGH! EVERYTHING'S
ALREADY GONE WRONG
TONIGHT-- I DON'T WANNA
TALK ABOUT THAT
RIGHT NOW.

ALRIGHT. I'VE
BEEN TRYING TO
AVOID SAYING IT
LIKE THIS, BUT--

--**THIS** IS
EXACTLY WHY
YOU'RE SUCH A

DISAPPOINTMENT

WH...
WHAT?

WHY WOULD
YOU SAY
THAT...?

TO DAD!

I MEANT A
DISAPPOINTMENT
TO DAD, NOT
AS A WHOLE!

STOP!

-CLICK-

SLAM!!

CRASH!!



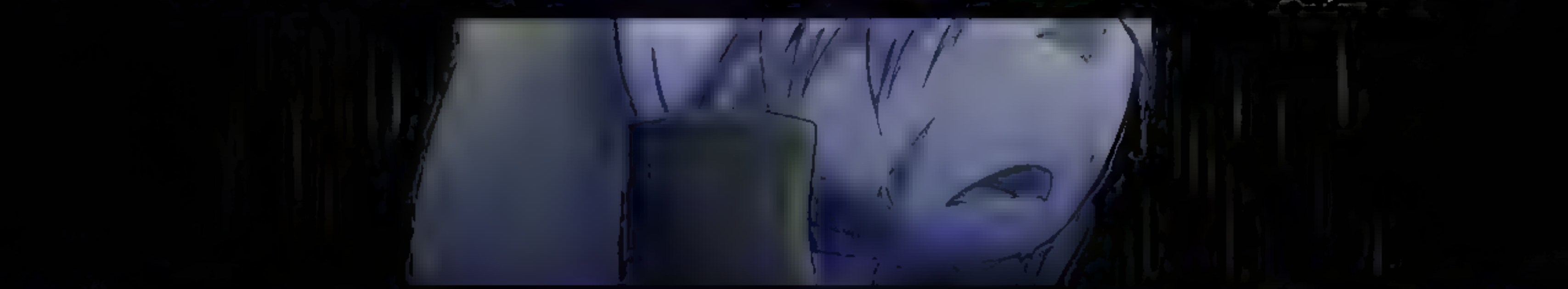


IF I DIDN'T
KNOW BETTER,
I'D SAY THERE'S
A RHO-DA-AGNA
BATTLE NEARBY.

HOW DO
YOU FIGURE?

WELL, ZHAZE, I
COULDN'T HEAR TOO
WELL UNDER THIS *CLEARLY*
MANIPULATED STORM, BUT I
COULD SWEAR SOMETHING
JUST EXPLODED.

THAT *WOULD*
BE CONCERNING...
BUT YOU **DO** KNOW
BETTER, RIGHT? SO
I GUESS IT WAS--



--JUST
LIGHTNING.

I GUESS?
IT SOUNDED
LIKE IT HIT RIGHT
THERE, THOUGH!

I HOPE THE
DORM KIDS ARE
DOING OK.

THEY'RE
FINE.

IF THE
WEATHER WAS
GOING TO GET
THAT BAD, WE'D
HAVE GOTTEN
A WARNING
DAYS AGO.

THAT'S JUST
WHAT IT SOUNDS
LIKE WHEN LIGHTNING
STRIKES CLOSE BY.
IT'S REAL--



--FREAKING
LOUD! ANYONE GET
A GOOD LOOK?

NAH, KHEIL'S
"KEEP YOUR WINDOWS
SHUT" RULE REALLY
KILLED MY ROOM'S
VANTAGE POINT
VISIBILITY.

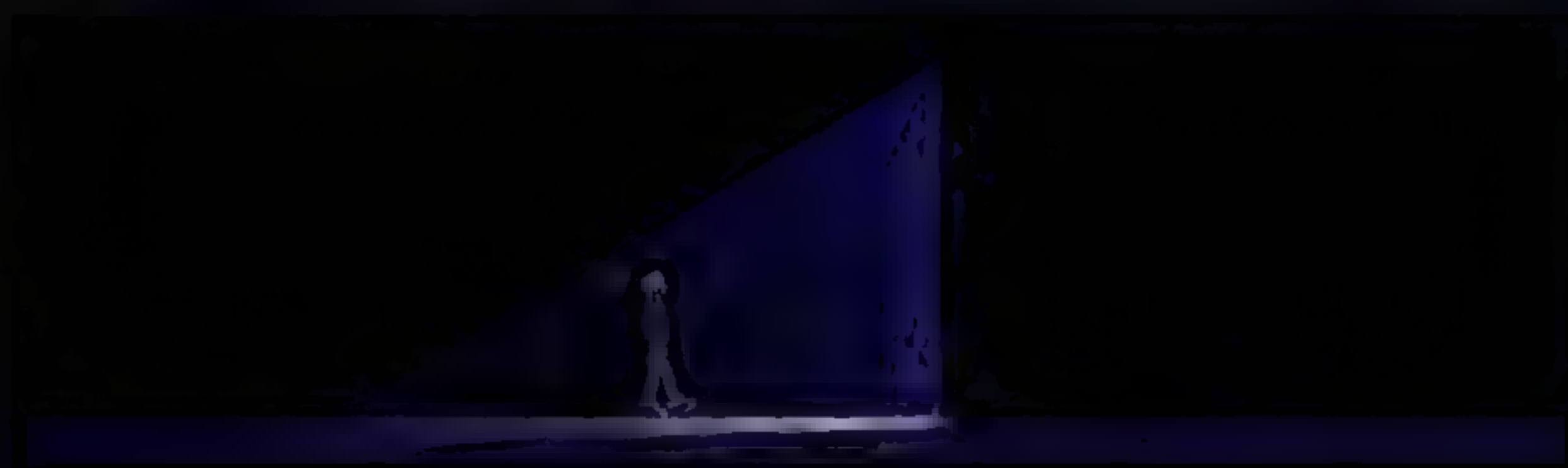
NO! STICK
TO THE PLAN
AND STAY PUT.
STAY CONNECTED.
ANYONE ALREADY IN
DORM D CAN COME
WAIT FOR THEM
AT THE LOBBY.

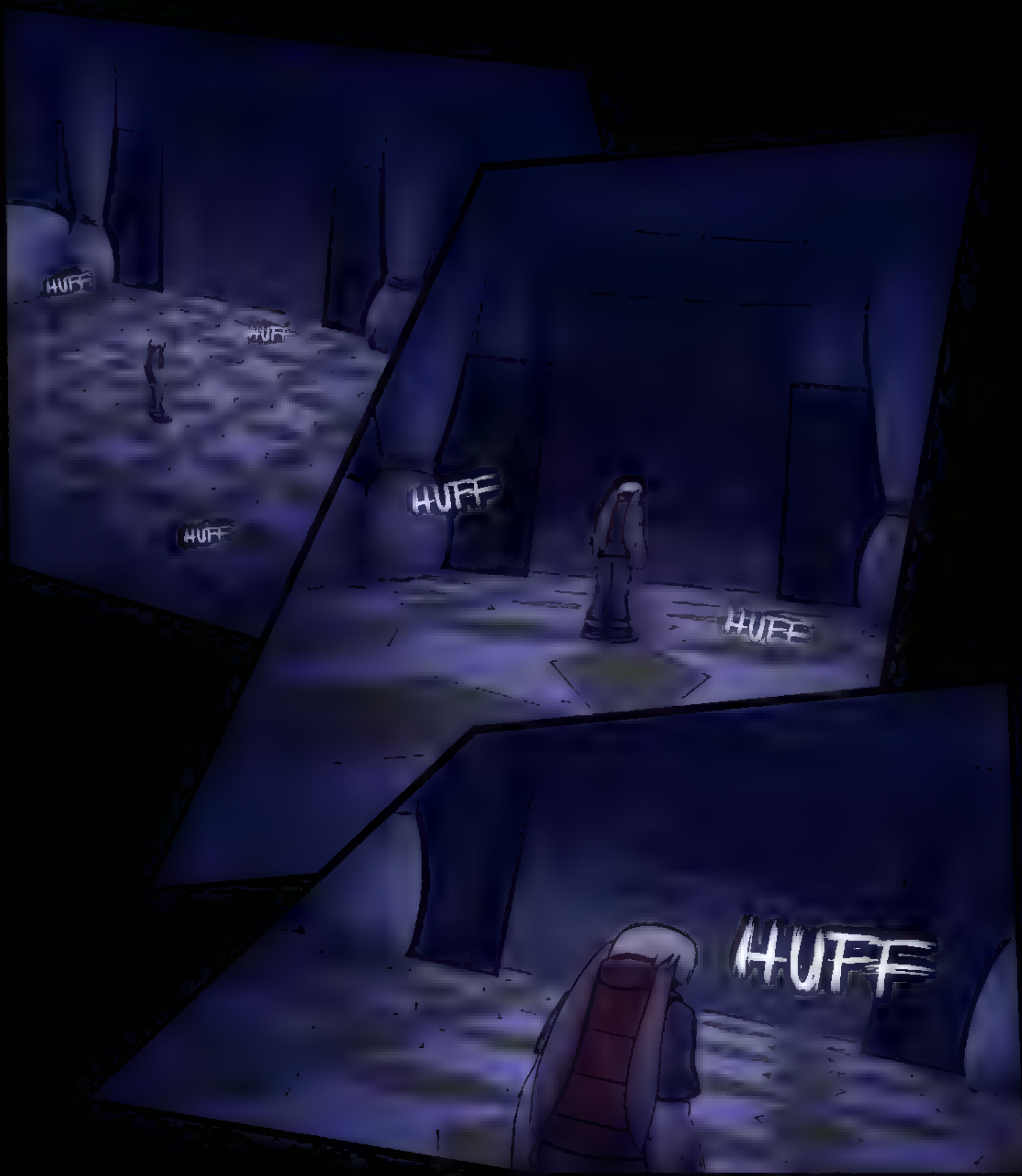
SAME.

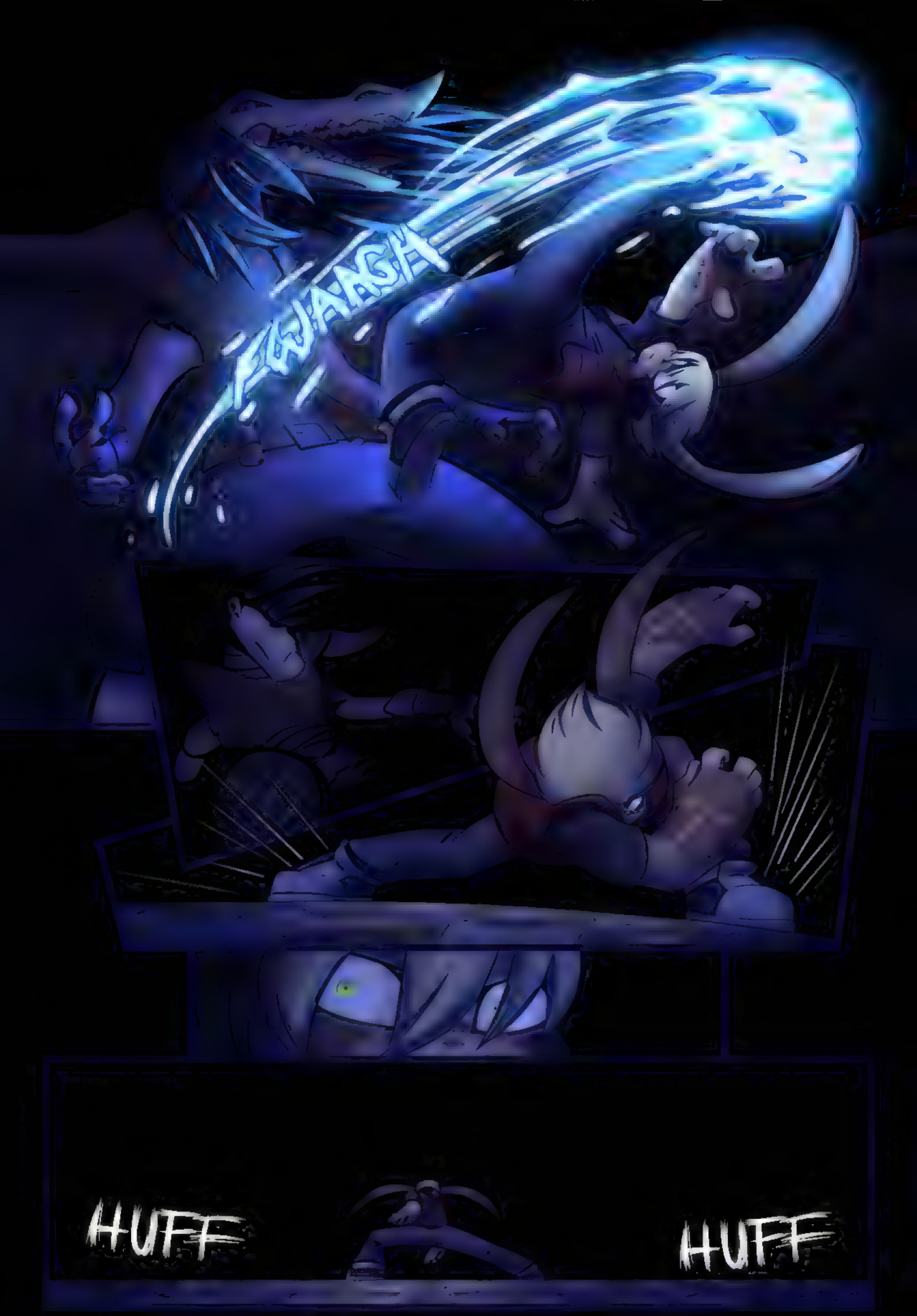
SAME.

RAIN DIDN'T
HELP.

SHOULD
WE...







FOCUS.

TARGET CAN NAVIGATE
DARKNESS WITH EASE.
POSSIBLE SCOTOPIC VISION.

VERTICAL ATTACK
VECTOR WOULD
MAKE SENSE,
BUT THEY KNOW IT
WOULD MAKE THEM
THE MOST VULNERABLE
TO MY ATTACKS.

LAKE SIDE STANDS TO
MAKE THEM VISIBLE. TOO
HIGH RISK FOR A MINIMAL
POTENTIAL PAYOFF.

FOREST SIDE IS
CLUTTERED. LIKELY TO
IMPEDE MOBILITY.

PROXIMITY DISCOURAGED
BY SECONDARY HOSTILE...

FALLAN *IS*
HOSTILE TO
THEM. RIGHT?

FOCUS
Y-YES!
DEFINITELY!

THIS LEAVES
THEM ONE BEST
OPTION.

DIRECTLY
IN FRONT.

TARGET HAS
PROVED TO BE
INCREDIBLY FAST.

MEANING THERE'S
A HIGH CHANCE THEY
CAN DODGE THIS.

YUP.

AND YOU'VE GOT
A COUNTER ATTACK
READY, TOO.

SO THIS
FIGHT...

IS ABOUT WHO
HAS THE MOST
SURPRISE MOVES.



ROLES
REVERSED.

YOU'RE PROBABLY
ANALYZING THE STAGE
LIKE I JUST DID.

BUT UNLIKE
ME, YOU HAVE NO
REASON TO ANTICIPATE
AN OVERHEAD ASSAULT!

GOT
YOU!



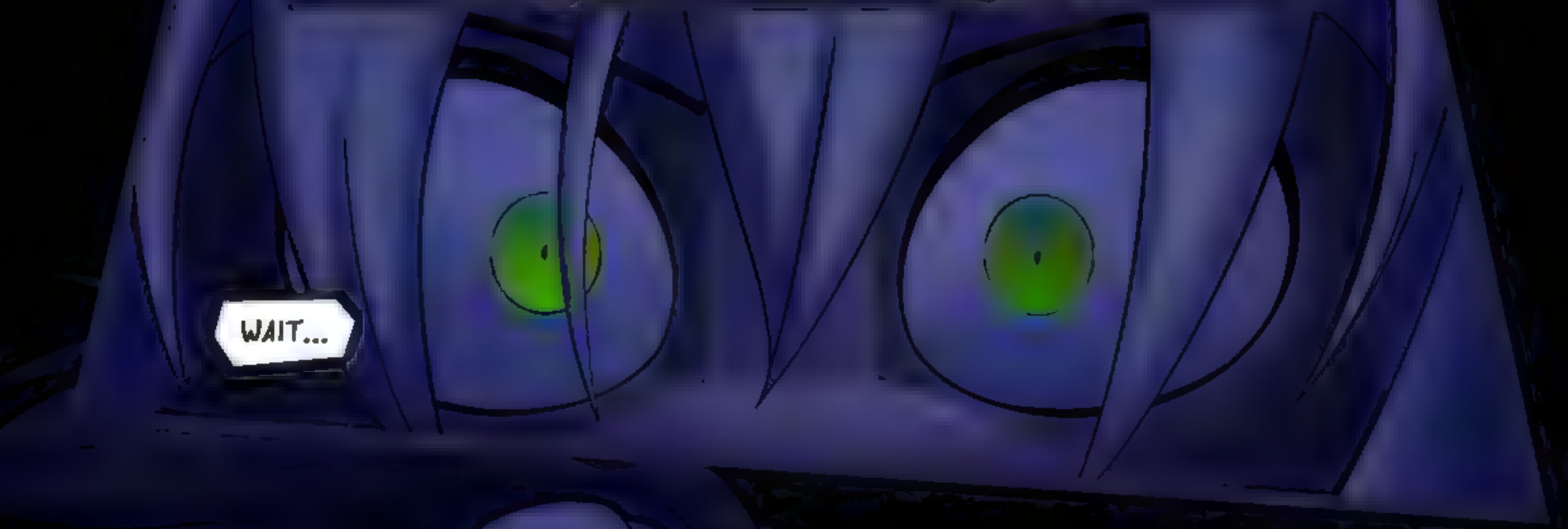


YOUR MOVE,
CHUCKLEHEAD.

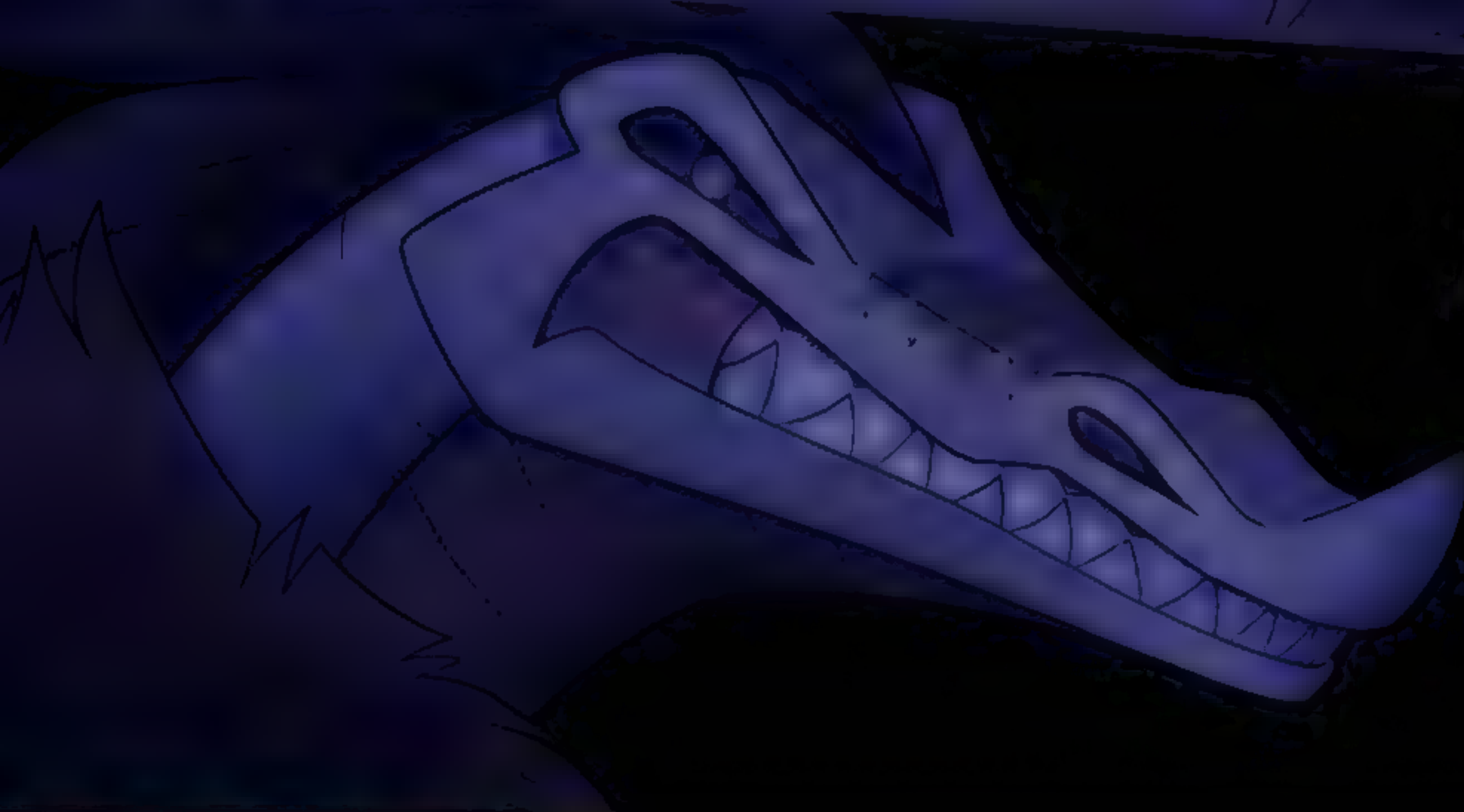


HANG ON.
ARE YOU...

CHECKING FOR
INJURIES?



WAIT...



THAT MEANS
YOU'RE **NOT**
DAMAGED...?

YOUR ABILITY TO EFFICIENTLY TAKE DOWN A FOE IS SOMETHING WE ALL KNOW YOU COULD DO IN SECONDS.

YET, HERE YOU ARE...

DEBILITATED

PAST HISTORY SAYS YOU CAN BE HURT, BUT IT'S NOT WORKING.

YOU'RE IMPOSSIBLY FAST, BUT YOU HAVEN'T KEPT UP WITH ME

LAST TIME, I CAUSED DAMAGE THROUGH SUSTAINED CONTACT BURN; NOT TRANSIENT IMPACT.

IS THAT ON CHIMPNEY WHAT THEY ARE YOU HUNTING?

DO YOU BITE?

WHAT'S YOUR GOAL? ABDUCT THE OTHERS? OR ELSE WHAT'S LARGER NG W TLESS

LIKELY THE RESULT OF NATURALLY OCCURRING ARMOR OR ENHANCED FORTITUDE NEBU-KHEN

HOW DOES THAT ARIAS YOUR STRATEGY?

POTENTIAL WEAK POINTS AROUND APPARENT HARD PLATING?

ARMORED CHIROPTERA CAN YOU REALLY USE THOSE IN COMBAT?

TWENTY FOUR CLAWS TOTAL

NO WHEN RHO RINGS PRESENT, AND THAT SILENCER WAS AUTOMATED, SO NOT LIKELY A WELDER.

YOU DO HAVE AN EQUIPMENT BELT. MAYBE I CAN NAB SOMETHING AND USE IT

FALLAN IS UNARMED AND SHOULD GET INVOLVED

WHERE IS DZ?

N.O. BETTER FOR EM TO STAY AWAY

KEEP YOUR EYES ON ME AS LONG AS I'M YOUR FOCUS THE OTHERS ARE SAFE AND CAN GET HELP

POSSIBLE STRATEGY WILL REQUIRE PROLONGED PROXIMITY, PUTTING US BOTH IN DANGER.

WATCH FOR USE OF DEINONIC CLAWS.

CAN'T RUN AWAY AND LEAVE OTHERS BEHIND.

CAN'T JUST RLY ON ANYONE WHO EVEN IF I DO HAVE PEOPLE WATCHING THE SKY FOR ANIMALS

TARGET DOESN'T BEHAVE LIKE THEY HAVE SCOUTING CV'S ON FAVOR OF PROFICIENT DARKNESS NAVIGATION

WHAT CAN I EXPECT

IRRELEVANT RIGHT NOW

50/50 CHANCE I INCINERATE THEM OR GET TORN APART. NOT GREAT ODDS.

WHAT DO I DO HERE

COULD SIGNAL OUTSIDE BY BLOWING UP CEILING... RISK OF FALLING DEBRIS POSING DANGER TO FALLAN AND DORM KIDS TOO GREAT.

BUT I CAN TAKE THE FIGHT OUTSIDE AND REALLY LIGHT THINGS UP.

IF YOU'RE DONE PLAYING--

STOP.

YOU REALLY SHOULD LET THE ADULTS HANDLE THIS AND AVOID MAKING TROUBLE.

STOP!

I NEED YOU OUT OF MY WAY TO GET OUTSIDE...

IF I'M RIGHT, YOU ALSO FIGURED OUT YOU'RE AT RISK IF I MANAGE TO GRAB A HOLD OF YOU.

SO IF I CAN FORCE A DODGE...

GOOD.

A REAL SOLDIER DOESN'T TOY WITH A THREAT.

THE MORE YOU SHOW OFF, THE MORE THEY LEARN ABOUT YOUR STRENGTHS. AND YOUR WEAKNESSES.

SO STOP SHOWING OFF.

STOP!

THAT GIVES ME A CLEAR SHOT AT-

AGH

DISASTROUS DISASTROUS









RISKING GETTING HIT WITH YOUR OWN LESS LETHAL BASS STUNNER TO AVOID ME BLOWING YOUR ARMS OFF IS A HELL OF A LOT MORE CREATIVELY INSANE THAN I THOUGHT I COULD EXPECT FROM ANYONE...

IN A DIFFERENT CONTEXT, I THINK I'D HAVE LOVED THAT... BUT NOW IT'S TIME FOR *ME* TO GET CREATIVE.



LET'S FINISH THIS.



-BEEP-

-BEEP-

-BEEP-

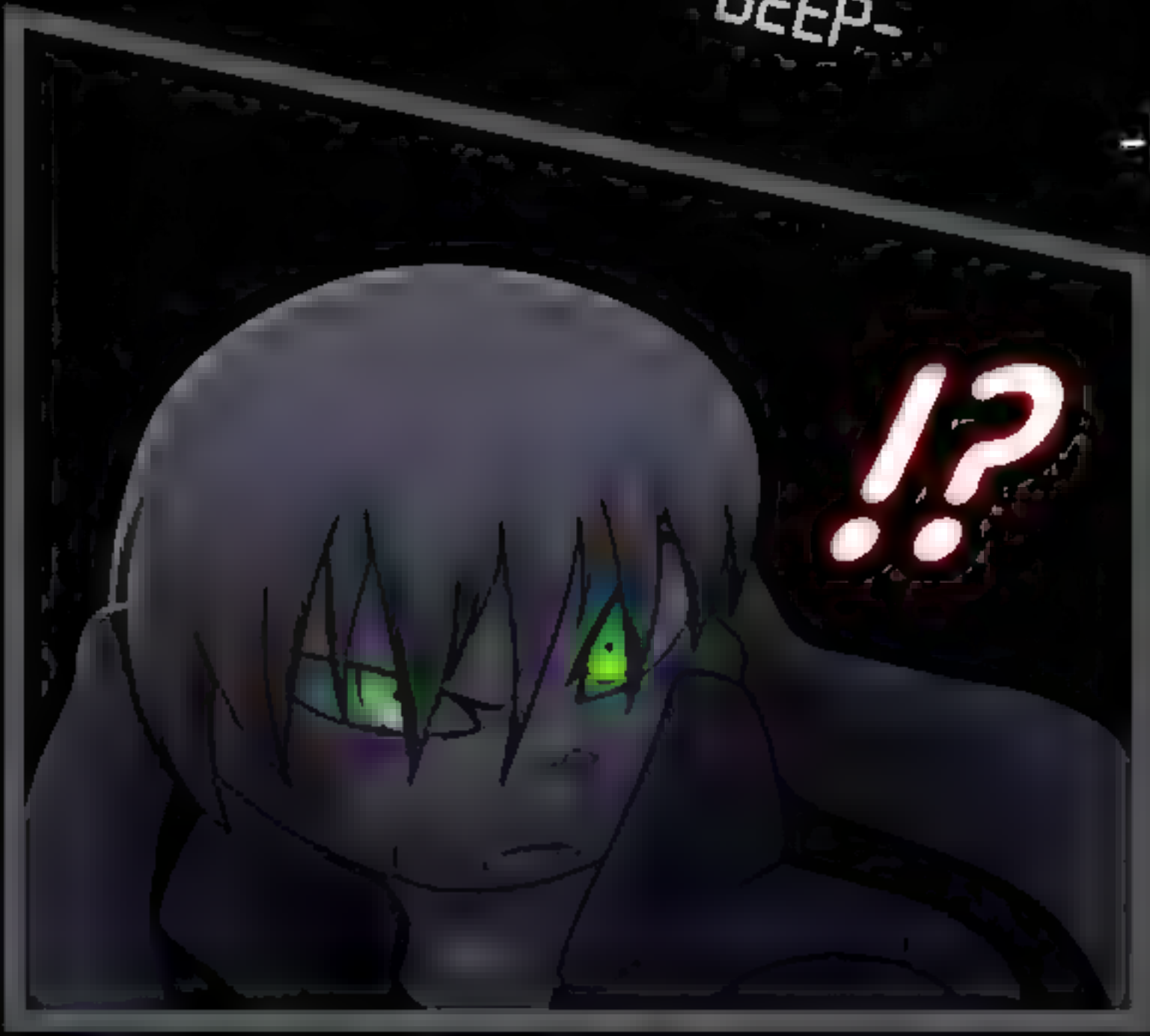
-BEEP-

-BEEP-

-BEEP-

-BEEP-

-BEEP-





UGH, OUT OF TIME...

LOOKS LIKE I'LL HAVE TO GIVE YOU SOME CREDIT, KID.

REALLY THOUGHT I'D SWOOP IN AND NAB YOU LIKE THE REST OF THE SAND BAGS HERE.

CRACK

HELL ARE YOU DOING NOW?

BUT I GUESS THE RUMORS ABOUT YOU WERE TRUE.

YOU REALLY ARE A LITTLE **MONSTER.**

DON'T LET ANY ONE THING GIVE YOU TUNNEL VISION, HONEY.

DON'T WORRY MS. TANNI.

THEY CAN PLAY ALL THE MIND GAMES THEY WANT.

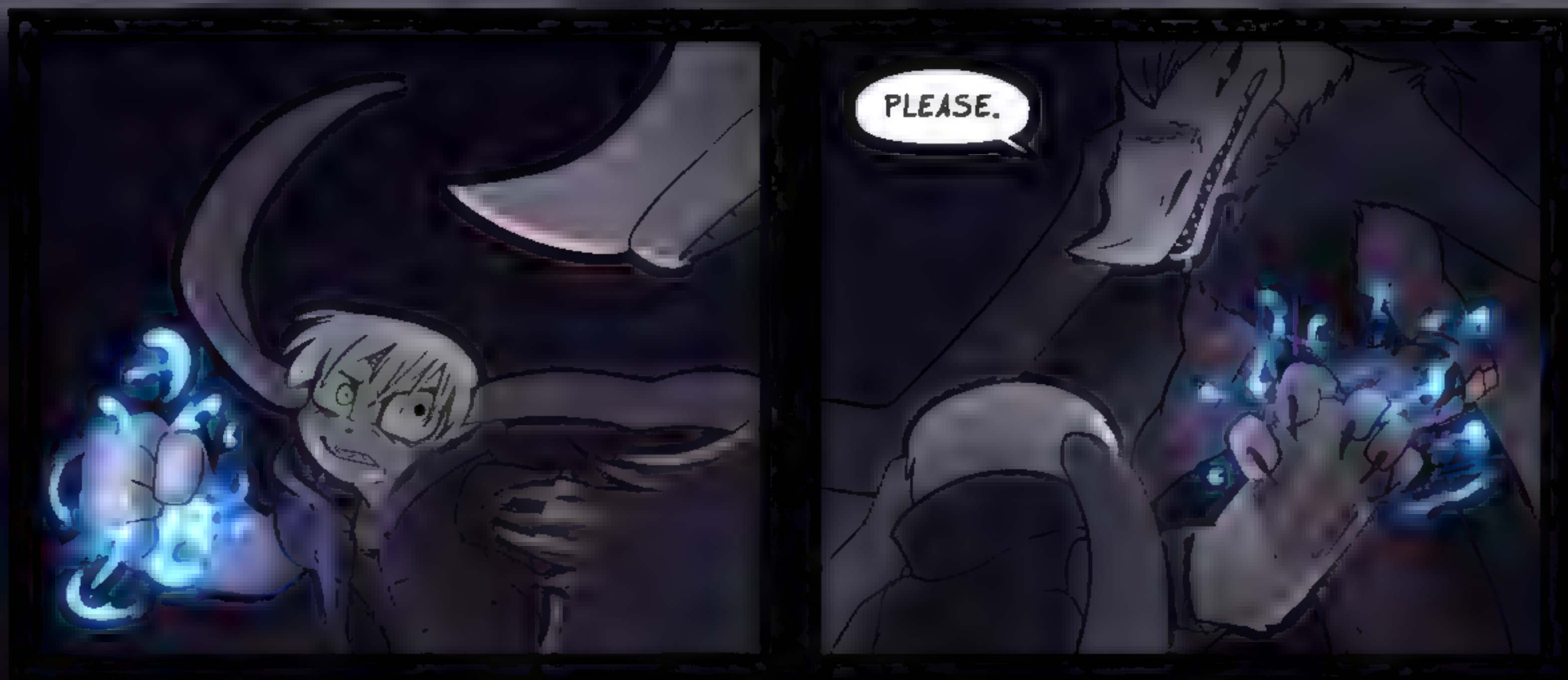
I'M READY FOR ANYTHING THEY'VE GOT.





SHUT UP
AND STOP
CRYING.

YOU AREN'T
DONE HERE.



PLEASE.

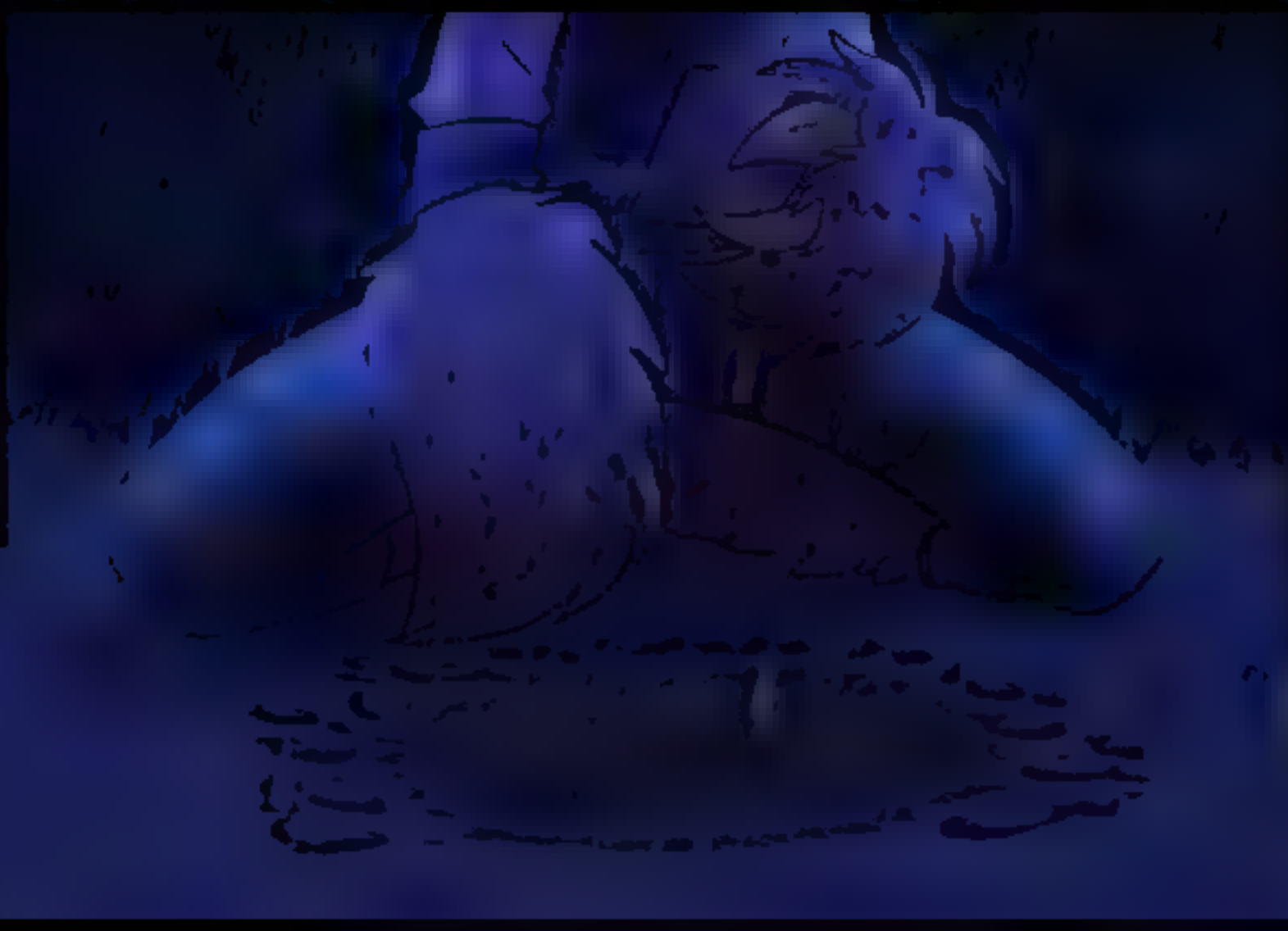
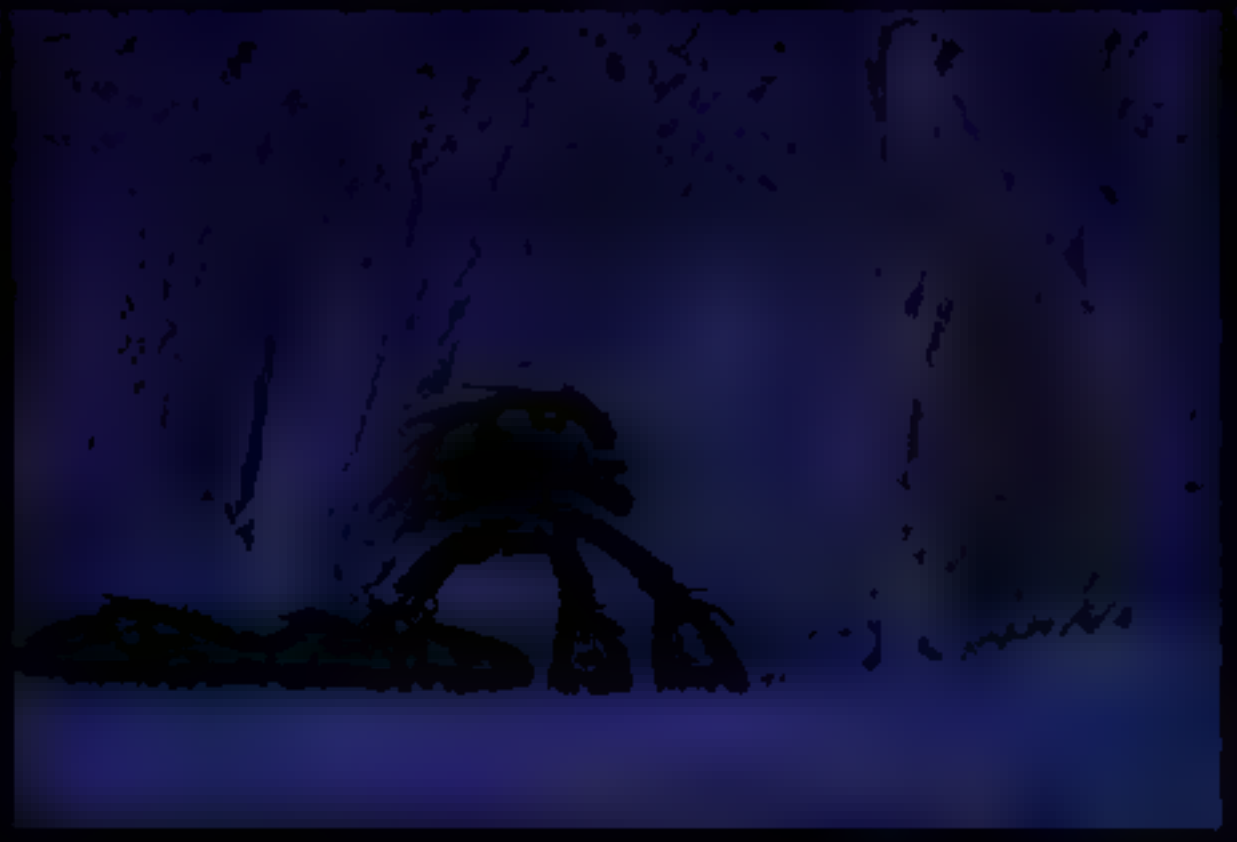
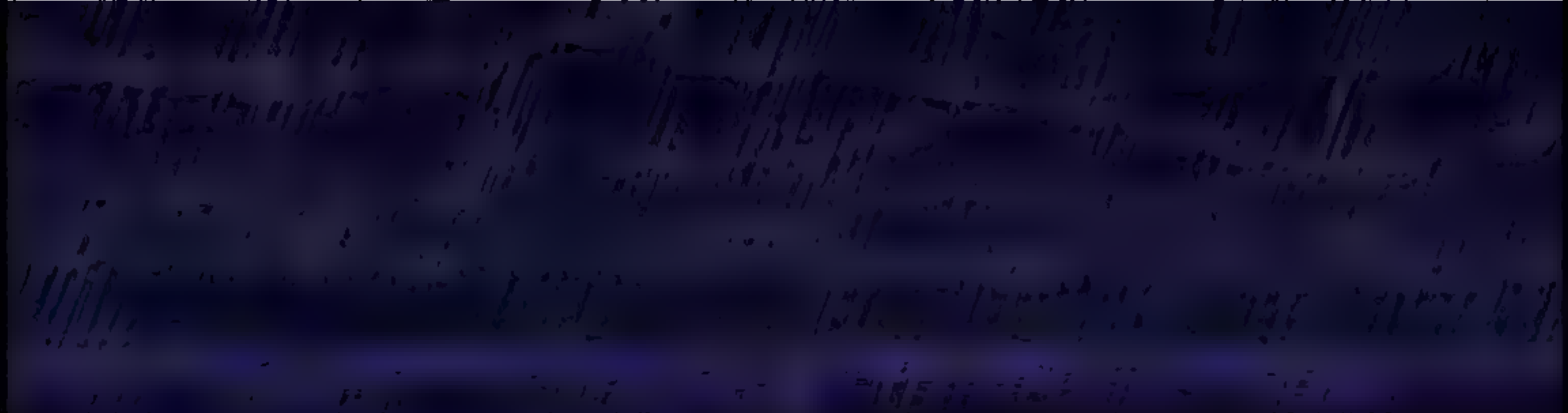


WHAT? YOU WANT ME
TO KEEP SINGING YOUR
PRAISES? GOOD JOB BEING
ABLE TO THROW A PUNCH WHILE
YOUR WHOLE NERVOUS SYSTEM
IS SUPPOSED TO BE ON
FIRE WHILE YOU SHUT
DOWN, I GUESS.

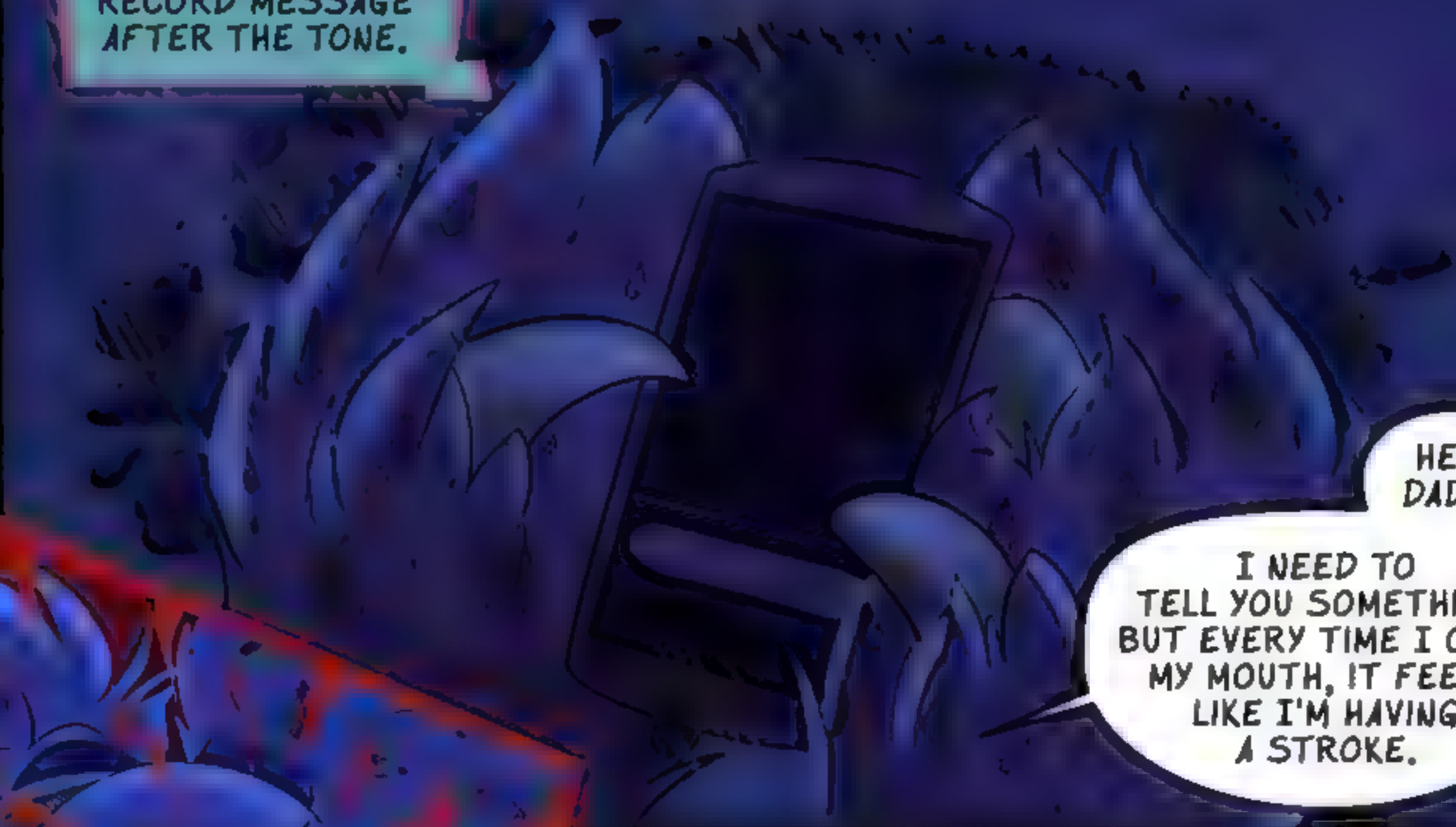
BUT DON'T GET
ME WRONG. YOU MAY
BE A LITTLE FREAK
BUT YOU'RE STILL
JUST SOME KID.







RECORD MESSAGE
AFTER THE TONE.



HEY,
DAD...

I NEED TO
TELL YOU SOMETHING,
BUT EVERY TIME I OPEN
MY MOUTH, IT FEELS
LIKE I'M HAVING
A STROKE.



I'M NOT...
SUPPOSED TO...
GAG TELL YOU.



SO I'M GOING
TO SAY WHAT
LITTLE I CAN. YOU'LL
HAVE TO CONNECT
THE DOTS.

REMEMBER HOW I SAID NOTHING STRANGE HAPPENED YESTERDAY? WELL...

NOTHING STRANGE HAPPENED TONIGHT, EITHER.

STORM IS SLOWING DOWN. I CAN SEE THE EMERGENCY LIGHTS, FINALLY. SO LET'S BE CLEAR:

DORM D IS GOING IN TO CHECK ON OZ AND KHEIL NAZURET SINCE WE HAVE THREE PEOPLE HERE. EVERYONE ELSE STAY PUT.

THREE? I THOUGHT ONLY YOU AND ZARU LIVED THERE.

ZAE DECIDED TO GO AGAINST OUR VERY EXPLICIT RULES AND CAME TO THE DEBRIEF DESPITE THE ABYSSAL TYPHOON OUTSIDE.

I'M—

GETTING CHEWED OUT *LATER*. FOR NOW, THIS IS A GOOD THING. EVERYONE GET READY.

UHM, GUYS? THERE'S SOMEONE OUT THERE. THEY'RE COMING HERE.

WHAT?

HUH?



CAN YOU
GET A LIGHT
ON THEM?

IT'S
OZ!

LET'EM
IN!



WHERE
IS KHEIL?

SHE'S NOT
WITH YOU?

WHAT?



KHEIL'S GONE!
WE HAVE TO
FIND HER!



WE CAN HELP,
BUT WE NEED TO
KNOW WHAT'S
GOING ON.
WHAT
HAPPENED?

OZ! BABE,
FOCUS.



UH... I...
WOKE UP.



OH, GOOD!
YOU'RE UP,
FINALLY.

WHAT
THE-- WHAT
HAPPENED?

WHERE'S
KHEIL?

TOOK
OFF.

DIDN'T WANT
TO DISTURB YOUR
LITTLE NAP HERE, SO
I STAYED BEHIND TO
KEEP AN EYE
ON YOU.

... WHAT?



GAH!



WOAH WOAH
WOAH, WHO
WAS THAT?

KHEIL'S
SIBLING,

KHEIL HAS
A SIBLING?

UGH... I SHOULD
HAVE PRESSED BUT I
PANICKED AND CAME
STRAIGHT BACK.

I DON'T
BUY IT.

FALLAN NAZURET
IS HERE AND IS IN
ON IT, TOO? WHAT
IS GOING ON WITH
THIS FAMILY?

